

A COMPLETE STORY.

(All the Year Round.)

CHAPTER I.

"Hello!" cried a boy who was sprawling on a nursery floor. "Find me the last week ago."

"You are vulgar," was the rejoinder made to this by a very small girl.

She, Maud, was in her rightful domain, the nursery. Harry was an intruder, and the terror of the children's exasperation. She had given up Harry three years ago, and now he was thirteen, and as she declared, he had grown quite rumpusous, and he had upset the children so."

The Boyles were three, headed by Maud; above her was a vacant space of three years when Harry showed his "rumpusous" self; above him came two girls. There in the family list, headed by father and mother.

There was not a more charmingly commonplace, more pleasantly successful family in the three kingdoms. They lived in a London suburb, and they had plenty of friends and comfort.

"You are vulgar!" Maud had cried. "So you are if you got such a find. Harry! I say, where's the matter?"

"Gone out, Master Harry," nurse answered.

"What a bore! Now mind, nurse, that's my step-niece. Now you keep it, if I hadn't to play to match this afternoon I'd hang about till mother was back."

"Do they want you very much?" This was an infantile remark of small Harry's.

"Don't you make any mistake," Harry was grand. "Should I be in Plummer's eleven if I wasn't something? Just see me bat, that's all."

"I'd like to see you, but we can't have kids on our ground."

"At which Harry subsided, and Harry took himself off to den his cricketing fancies."

When he had gone the nursery inmates looked at his sixpence, and each child handled it as if there were some magic in it.

"What did Harry mean when he called out that long word 'findings'?" asked Maud.

"Bless you, Miss Maud! He only meant 'he'd had the 'findings' he'd have a right to the 'keeping'."

"An account on each word did not make the good woman's explanation clear to the child."

Nurse went on mending socks and the children returned to their play. Maud kept silence; not a common circumstance, to pass unremarked. All at once she spoke thus:

"Do you mean, nurse, that if I picked up hundreds of thousands of gold sovereigns they would all be mine?"

"Her eyes were alight and quite a red glow was flushing her round face."

"Nonsense, Miss Maud! What should you be wanting gold sovereigns for?"

"But, if I found them?"

"Ah, 'if'! You're not likely to find them. I never did. They don't float about nursery floors, nor they."

"Ah, but outside somewhere?"

"And the child made a gesture, as if with her hand arms she would encircle the great, vague world."

"I have sent you, and the Boyles nurse had become almost a forgotten thing. Nurse had come to find out another nursery good many degrees higher in the monetary if not in the social scale, and she, when her 'family' was in view, brought a little lady now and again to see the grown-up children who had once been her babies. But even to this there came an end—a temporary end—for things happened to the Boyles which carried them out of 'Nurse's' radius altogether."

Misfortune had seized the Boyles, and they were at their worst when, some ten years later, we meet them in a third-rate street at New-Cross.

The years had been sunny, prosperous years, then. Mr. Boyle was stricken by a dire malady, and had to leave business. He was a stockbroker, but in the year when illness made it necessary that his city affairs should be wound up there was panic upon panic, there were wars and rumors of wars, and lost followed loss in rapid succession.

On the eve of his father's failure Harry had sailed for Canada. He had bought a plot of Government land, and he was going to reclaim it, and so, they all hoped, dig a fortune out of it.

But a moderate family can live on a small income if, as the saying is, they "cut their coat according to their cloth." Mr. Boyle was a cheapskate. Harry (or Margaret) Boyle was named; Katherine was useful; Maud, now thirteen, might, if need showed itself, do work, but Harry and Dick must still go to school.

Yet a cycle of misfortune had begun, the life plentiful years were over, and the beginning of another life had come—years of trouble upon trouble. Mr. Boyle died, unwitting of the calamitous times; another, and then a third move had to be made, each one carrying the family into downward.

How did Mrs. Boyle's blood rebel when the day came for her to take little Dick to Seacroft's school, where he was to be taught and fed and clothed for so many years free of expense to her. Millionaires have been known to grow out of boys brought up at Seacroft's school, but what cheer is there in that thought to the poor mother, who sees her little son arrayed in the school garb, and who sees the gay summer sun glinting down from the trees in his blue eyes to the fine new brass buttons of his jacket?

But Dick became quite a happy lad there, and he did not know much of the home troubles; he got his holidays, and he saw two more new homes, but things were not sad to him. He had come to be fourteen; they were keeping him on at school because he was so clever.

Harry had not made his fortune in the five years, not that he did not know a good deal about it, for he did not often write home. Harry was seventeen, a nice bright lad in a merchant's office.

Maud for three years had taught as a daily governess. It would have been wiser if she had gone away and into a family, but a mistake was made, and the girl only gave lessons in the neighborhood. Katherine was the domestic mainstay of the house, and the house, during the past year, had had to admit a lodger.

This lodger had been a silent, nervous old gentleman, who gave no trouble whatever; a perfect godsend of a lodger, in fact. He was order itself. None of his belongings were ever allowed to litter his rooms. He read a good deal, but his books had their places orderly on their shelves, and were read and re-read, annotated, and digested. When the reading was laid aside the old gentleman would amuse himself by making pen-and-ink sketches of subjects which the old sketches of the past would be the prettiest of a Greek pot; or, sticking out from the rough edges of an antique volume of strange Eastern lore,

there would be the fantastic drawing showing how the strange hieroglyphics told their story.

Dick on holidays, and Maud, when the silent Mr. Harbutt came upon her in her dustings, were the two who were shown these things. Why, no one knew; and he never honored them with any other mark of favoritism.

But his residence with them came to an end, for certain relatives came home to India, and he was persuaded to go and end his days with his honors.

His due payments, and a handsome present he made the girls, set the household on a very easy, comfortable footing for several weeks, weeks in which search was made for a new lodger.

Many applied, but none were quite of the right sort, after the kind, orderly, quiet old gentleman. The money filtered away, and it was clear that the Boyles must accept another lodger or be very pinched indeed. They at last accepted two sisters of the most tiresome and exacting character. Kate and Maud served for them, but service was wearisome, as it must be when dry, thankless hearts claimed it.

"If only Mr. Harbutt were back!" sighed Maud. "Dear! how funny he was! Was the laughing ogle to her sight. Kate was a bright-souled being, and always ready to make the best of their troubles."

"I wonder whether he is as happy with those grand folks as he was here? He had all his things just as he chose," and Kate, with a duster in her hand—the ladies were out for the day—looked round on chaos. Where should she begin to straighten?

"Strange that he never writes," Maud mused.

"Did he ever write, dear?" Kate said. "Write at Ealing, I think. He composed, and he imagined, and he ruminated, but until those nephews looked him up I don't believe he received as much as one letter a month; certainly he never wrote one."

"No, I suppose not. Where was that one letter from that he sent when he left?"

"Durham—but that's nothing; he only went there to see somebody who had some rare manuscripts. He said that in the letter; he was going to see that nephew at Ealing, and then, when the people found a place to take he was going to settle down with them. A wild-goose chase for such a man as he!"

"Yes," again Maud spoke musingly. "I wish he had stayed here until they had found the place."

The very next day Maud saw this in the *Obituary of the Times*:

"On the 29th, at the Innercauld Arms, Rosslyn, while travelling, James Harbutt, aged seventy-one."

Monitory, mournful monitory, followed. The tiresome ladies stood on until they had been with the Boyles for just a year; then they thought they would like a change, and they left.

They left a small debt unpaid, and they gave no address.

As girls do, even girls who have too close an acquaintance with the rough side of life, the two Boyles made a grand glory in the departure of the Misses Payne.

"We may get some one even worse, though," said Kate, practically.

"Never mind what may be, we are here now," Maud rejoined, being, as we have said, always more light of heart than her sister was.

On that half holiday the girls, being so gay over their freedom, walked with Dick to the station, saw him off, and then went for a summer evening saunter among the fields. If you strike a bolt of lightning, and walk with the clatter of young, youthful limbs, you may, sooner than you may think, be among the sweet-smelling hayfields.

It was June, and if the haylovers were rather dusty there were fields beyond them. Maud's young soul drank in the fresh summer gladness, and she talked on of every possible subject. Past, present, and future all drew something from her; perhaps the last touched her the least, for she had been so young in the days of their good and happy, though she said she remembered everything, those old days had, nevertheless, but a visionary hold upon her.

"I have made a mistake, Kate, I see," she said as they walked homeward. "I should have gone away to teach—I should have made more money."

"And you would have held a better position," Kate always held a point decisively. "One drudge in a family is enough."

"I hate you to speak like that, Kate," Maud had a warm temper; such a possession is usually the companion of a warm heart. "If you drudge—horrid word—I drudge. If I got more money would not mother have it?"

"Don't be angry. I've a genius for domestic management; for goodness sake let me exercise it. But I agree with you about going away; you would be far better off in a family. Why should you stay here as Miss Marsden used to be with us?"

"She was a well governess."

"Not any more than you can be. I remember better than you do."

"Dear, how I should love those days of glory! Are they ever likely to come back? What can we do? Shall I board? Will Harry suddenly come home a millionaire? Will Harry's master pay him to become a partner at his tender age?"

"Maud!"

"Kate, why should not these things be?"

"Why should they be? You might as well say you expect to find a bag of gold when the next rainbow shines."

"I always do expect that—I have done ever since I was a baby."

By and by Maud's wild humor subsided, and she talked again about business. Yes, those girls had so long been accustomed to hard experiences that they felt naturally into talk of pros and cons in a dry, business way. By the time they reached home they had settled that Maud should go away.

Their mother was told at once, and she saw it was wise, and a little more planning was done as they sat over their simple supper. The *Times* should be had every day for the sake of the advertisements, and the vicar and the doctor should be asked to help.

All this was set in train the next morning; also, the next day Kate commanded a thorough turnout of the rooms, so as to be in readiness for a new-comer.

The evening post brought a letter from Harry, dated "San Francisco." He had not written for nearly a year, and this was the news: He had found farming in Canada no good for him, and he had gone to San Francisco, meaning if all luck followed him then, never to write home again. Good luck came instead, and he was doing well.

"I manage a store," he said, "and two years ago my boys was worse off than I was when I came here. I won't say more, but I'll make this pay. Perhaps I'll be sending you some bank notes home before the year is out."

"Poor Harry!" exclaimed his mother. She smiled, and yet her eyes were moist.

"Kate"—Maud tucked her hand

under her sister's arm as they went up to bed that night—"the days of glory are coming again! Now, you see!"

Kate laughed; she was very glad about Harry.

"I see," she said, "that you must put clean paper in these drawers tomorrow."

The morning came and she was doing it.

CHAPTER II.

Maud had opened the two drawing-room windows and let down the Venetian curtains, so that the room should be cool and shady. How good and summery it all looked! Ladies' fingers can so easily give simple decorations an air of grace and refinement. Then she left that room and went into the other behind; these two had been dear old Mr. Harbutt's rooms, and also the room of the tiresome Miss Paynes. This back room was shady, and at once the blind was drawn up to the top and the window thrown open as high as it would go.

There was in the room an old chest of drawers, the piece of furniture that Mr. Harbutt had once said was worth more than all else the room contained put together.

It was beautifully made, the dark old oak was of the finest grain, and how delicately were the joinings and corners fitted! A resolute hand, however, turned at the frontage of each drawer; on its top, too, making an artistic border to finish to its level polish, there was the same reeded decoration running four-square. Each drawer had two pendant and triangular brass handles. They copy these old things nowadays, but this was a veritable antique.

Five drawers in all, and in the top and most shallow one a key protruded from its keyhole. Maud remembered the whole thing as long as she remembered anything, for in olden days it had stood in the nursery. In those days the top shallow drawer was just as exactly level as the other drawers had been; fancy methodical nurse allowing that right-hand corner to project in that slightly way! If the piece of furniture had not been so seasoned by age one might have supposed that the wood had warped at that one corner.

Maud was bent upon straightening it. All the four lower drawers were provided with their fresh white paper lining, and now somehow some one had locked this top drawer, had forced the lock and bent the key.

"We'll have you straight," was Maud's cry to herself, and she worried the old key.

Never a bit would it move, except indeed to fix itself more firmly within the intricacies of the lock.

"I'll physic you," Maud cried. A moment's run down stairs for some oil, and a "physic" was used. Some few more wriggles and turnings, and hey, presto! the magic is done, the lock is loosened, the drawer is opened!

However, opened does not mean a simultaneous cure of its uneven corner. Oh! no. Pushing and dainty humoring are neither of any avail, the drawer simply will not work to its primitive level.

But Maud had a strong will and a mind that probed to the reason of things. In a trice she had the rebellious drawer out of its groove and indignantly laid at her feet, while a supple white arm was bent to the elbow and went on a search within the shallow space. From end to end arm and fingers went seeking; then the drawer was captured! The girl's pretty fingers, all covered with dust and fine, sweet the crisp crackle of firm paper.

"Ah!" was Maud's quick little cry. The paper was out before the light of the summer sun. Thin, gray-hued paper, tightly pressed once, but now, by some inherent strength surely, loosening from its pressure and elastically unfolding itself.

One fold—some printed words and figures. Bah! How dusty it was! Another fold—some foreign words quite clear. "D'Alma." What was that?

Had the thing really some magic in it? Maud's face became scarlet; then all the other folds from it, and leaving drawer and dust and white paper in confusion on the floor, the girl ran to the stair-head and called:

"Mother! Kate! Come quick!"

Both were busy, but such a voice of alarm—yes, Maud was really terrified—was not to be disregarded. They were up-stairs in a few seconds. "We've opened the drawer," she said.

"So we perceive. Have you found a dead mouse behind it?"

Kate, seeing Maud unharmed, was naturally a bit rattled at having been unnecessarily excited by the cry.

"No! I have found this."

Now Maud was prematurely still. She held out the strange paper, by this time yet more crumpled, in her hand. As Kate took it, it resolved itself into not one paper only, but four papers, and the three corners shook them selves apart. One had square bits cut out—yes, decidedly cut out.

"Bonds, mother!" Kate gasped.

"Don't talk nonsense, child."

Kate was not listening. She had had to become acquainted with many business matters, but she had never seen quite such papers as these. She looked at them, and lingered there; 750 lire, two hundred and fifty lire; 750 lire, she deciphered. "What are lire?"

"I know," Maud put in. "A lire is the same as a franc—Italian money."

"These are money, mother." And again Kate was reduced to a gasping condition.

"Where are they? They are not ours, I'm sure. Poor Mrs. Boyle pressed her hands together. How glad she would have been to think they were hers! Let me look at them, Kate."

"Finding is keeping!" cried Maud.

"I shall appropriate them."

"Maud!" and Kate came back from her tremor to face the actual. "They are simply Mr. Harbutt's. The Miss Paynes, you may be sure, never left anything so valuable behind them."

"Perhaps it will pay their debt!" Maud by this time had lost her terror; she had passed it on to her mother and sister, and she herself was the amusement of the thing. "My energy has done some good this time, at any rate."

"It must be hundreds of pounds, mother."

Kate was standing with her hands in the pockets of her Holland apron, and was watching her mother look at the discovery.

Mrs. Boyle's pale face had grown graver by some few degrees.

"They are bonds, but what of I do not know. I know so little of the look of these things," she mused.

"Where are they? Where?"

"Perhaps ours, mother." And Maud poked her hand consolingly within her mother's arm.

"That chest of drawers belongs to the days of our glory. There! I don't say last night, when Harry's letter came, but our good times were coming again!"

"Perhaps they are." And Mrs. Boyle gave a little convulsive hug to

Maud's comforting hand. We'll hasten dinner, girls, and one of you shall go with me to John Bryant's. He, at least, will say whether the things are of value or not."

"You'll not give them up to him, mother? Give up my find?" Kate cried.

"Maud, do not act the infant, and learn what has to be learned."

It was as Kate had supposed. The four papers together represented the sum of £2,000, and were Italian Government bonds.

But whose were they? They bore no man's name.

CHAPTER III.

The treasure had to lie in John Bryant's strong room.

John Bryant was a stockbroker, and as such he had been, and was in truth, had lasted on from the old days of their prosperity. He was an upright man, and he guarded the interests of the Boyles as well as if they were his own.

He looked the strange Italian bonds, which were Maud's "finds," in his strong room. There they must lie while inquiries were made as to their ownership.

"They are yours, Miss Maud, until some one can prove a better claim," he said, as he took the hands of the girl, and he said, "I hope no one will claim them," and with a kindly pomposity he owned, he made a little flourish in the air with one hand. "Now, I should like to speculate a little with it for you—double it—treble it!"

"Or—lose it?"

"That is cruel. No; speculation should never meddle with it. I was only talking empty nonsense."

"Speculate or my governing, Mr. Bryant," the girl said, as the three stood on the landing of the staircase. "That would be a real kindness, now."

"Yes, I will." Here gravity and purpose came and settled on John Bryant's face, to the exclusion of any such things as merriment or the excitement of speculation. "I will," he said again.

Then the two ladies went away, and the man went back to his office to puzzle his head over Maud's good fortune. In his present mind—one step behind the present mind of a woman's independence—he saw an unconscious in the child of his old friend going out to earn her bread among strangers.

Maud, a stranger, went to strangers; new claims came upon her days; a wider, new life came circling about her; time each week seemed to her to be growing more full, more rich; in a while she grew to look upon herself in the New-Cross life as a dim possibility, so surely was she absorbing all the influences of the pleasant, dim, luxurious home where she taught two young girls.

The bonds still lay unopened; by dint of wisely-framed advertisements claimants came forward whose pretensions would not bear the sittings of lawyers' questions. The bonds were still Maud's, as John Bryant would have it, though a year had run by since the summer day when she had found them.

Maud's prophecy of good fortune coming to them was gradually being fulfilled. Harry had really sent over a good round sum to his mother; Harry got a rise in his office; a cousin of Mrs. Boyle's came to live with them at New-Cross, and brought a good addition to the family purse. Times were no longer "hard times."

Search was made for Mr. Harbutt's nephew, when the old gentleman they now remembered had never spoken of any other name than that of "Lewis." Now, was "Lewis" a Christian name or a surname?

As pointed as could be done, advertisements went the round of the country concerning "unclaimed stock." The Boyles did, and always would, insist upon the belief that the Italian bonds belonged to Mr. Harbutt.

"Have an advertisement giving his name," said Maud, in a little home.

"Miss Maud is losing her business head," was John Bryant's answer, when they told him what she had said.

"The things are a nightmare to me," Mrs. Boyle said.

"Then, my good lady, we will have the advertisement printed at once. Shall the first Harbutt who comes have them?"

Her adviser was a bit testy. It was a September evening, and the scene was a luxurious drawing-room in a Yorkshire country house. It was the house in which Maud Boyle was governess. Work was over for the day, and she, with Cicely and Nan Simpson, was as usual passing the evening with the rest of the family. The two girls were fourteen and fifteen years of age; they were "the children" of the household. A stepbrother, young Lewis Simpson, was a son of vanity; he, too, was in the room. The mother was there, also the grandmother, the mother of the present Mrs. Simpson.

Across the Yorkshire moors a September wind had been blowing all day, and a winter-like fire burned in the wide grate. But it was evening, and the three girls were pretty light garments. The two Simpsons were in white; Maud, though the material of her gown was no more than a modest, dark-colored stuff, and, seeing no lamps were lit, the flickering gleam of twilight left her just a warm-toned shadow, she being a brown-haired maiden herself.

The bell had just been rung, and as the lamps were brought in there also came the big brother, a tall man and very fair, as his father and Cicely were. He lounged in as young men do lounge in among a home company of women-kind. He threw himself on a seat by Mrs. Simpson, and he threw one new paper across to the old lady whom he called "Granny," but who, of course, was no grandmother to him.

"Have you read this advertisement?"—you are advertised for, Lewis," said Granny.

"Never! Who wants me? Is some one leaving me a fortune?"

Young Lewis put a pretended he was fatigued, and lazily threw himself on the couch by the old lady.

"You have had that happen once—that is more than most men get. They read."

The old lady gave him the newspaper and pointed with her spectacles, which she had just taken from her nose.

He read.

His fair face flushed.

Then he read aloud. "Listen," he said, "it's me!" What was grammar at such a moment?

"HARBUUTT.—To any of the names, or claiming under a will made by a person of that name. Unclaimed stock found. Apply first by letter to Reeves & Lever, Solicitors, Old Broad street, London."

"That's my advertisement."

The cry was from Maud.

"You? Yours?"

Every one seemed to be echoing her cry.

"I'll tell you," Maud said in her clear, business-like way. "I found some bonds once, and so the other day I advised their advertising for the name 'Harbutt.'"

"That was my old uncle's name, you know"—Simpson here drew a

chair to Maud's side—"my mother's uncle, an eccentric old man; we hunted him up when we came home last year."

"Our Mr. Harbutt!—our dear old Mr. Harbutt!"

Maud clapped her hands, this time with very real excitement.

"Yours? Were yours?"

"He lived with us—lodged with us." Maud's face flushed with a certain pride.

"But I am very glad—and you are the 'Lewis' he talked about?"

They talked a little more over it, and presently Mr. Simpson, the father, came in and had to tell the whole history over again.

"Strange!" old Mr. Simpson mused; "but that no inquiry found you before, Lewis. The papers bear Harbutt's name, Miss Boyle!"

"No; no name at all!"

"No name at all!" he echoed.

"Then why are they his? Five hundred people may have used that drawer."

"Oh, no!" Maud said quietly. "Only he used it, except ourselves."

"Then they may be yours."

"No, no, no! I never had business papers like that at home."

"They were not down in the list of securities under showed me," said